



Mental Health Update July 28, 2006

MENTAL HEALTH

Paul Blake to Retire September 1, 2006

Deputy Commissioner Paul Blake announced this week that he will retire September 1st. To recount his career of nearly 40 years is like a walk through virtually all of the major developments in Vermont's public mental-health services. He has been personally involved in most of the initiatives and systemic changes that went into building the community system:

- From inpatient care to community rehabilitation and treatment for adults with severe mental illness
- From group homes to supported apartments and independent living for consumers
- From day treatment to psychosocial clubhouses to consumer empowerment
- From office-based therapy to outreach case management and other psychosocial rehabilitation approaches
- From sheltered workshops to supported employment: real jobs for real wages in real workplaces

and much more, paralleling the growth of strong consumer and family movements, leading the way to the modern recovery orientation in adult mental health.

Over the course of his distinguished career in the public mental-health system, Paul brought a depth and breadth of experience to a variety of leadership positions. He has been a psychiatric social worker at the Vermont State Hospital and a provider of clinical support services at the Howard Center for Human Services. Later he joined the Department of Mental Health to work in community and adult mental health. He led the Division of Mental Health as Director until being called upon to be interim executive director of the Vermont State Hospital and then to serve as Deputy Commissioner at a time of need to rebuild credibility and confidence in the State Hospital following decertification and other challenges. Paul's leadership in public mental health in Vermont has made achieving a nationally recognized comprehensive community mental health system a reality.

Most importantly, Paul's great personal qualities, coupled with his professional knowledge, were always apparent as he worked in a calm, sensitive and steady manner to bring about consensus. He listens and has a genuine interest in people—employees, practitioners, consumers and families. He knows Vermont and its history, the community system, the state hospital, the political landscape, and the constituencies we serve. Paul Blake will be missed. We wish him well and offer our heartfelt congratulations on his retirement.

Recruitment Process for Deputy Commissioner

Upon Paul Blake's retirement, Barbara Cimaglio has agreed to serve as interim Deputy Commissioner until a replacement is named. Barbara has been Deputy Commissioner of Health for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs since July, 2004, and will continue in that leadership role as well. As many of you know, Barbara has been actively involved in efforts to improve treatment and services for people with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, and has been working closely with Paul to better integrate policies regarding mental health and substance abuse services. Barbara will be overseeing day-to-day operations of the Division. Strategic decisions regarding the Vermont Mental Health Futures Project will be managed by Cynthia LaWare and by Acting Commissioner of Health Sharon Moffatt.

Commissioner Moffatt and Secretary LaWare have already begun the process to recruit for a new Deputy Commissioner. A job announcement will be posted in local, regional and national publications. And we will be inviting a small number of interested individuals (including mental health care providers, advocates and consumers) to participate as members of an Advisory Group whose charge will be to recommend candidates to me and the Commissioner for our consideration. Barbara will chair this Advisory Group.

The new Deputy Commissioner will be charged with furthering the Agency's goals of incorporating the valuable principles of public health and ensuring their full integration into the mental health care system in our state.

Certificate of Approval Procedures to be Revised Following Public Comment Period

Following a period of public comment, the procedures and application for a Certificate of Approval (COA) will be revised to reflect public input. Although the Division of Mental Health only received two written comments on the procedures, the plea to include a project-specific public review and comment process was convincing. The COA application packet and procedures will be revised to reflect this change for future applicants. The revised procedures and application will include:

- A requirement that the proposed project has been approved by the applicant's Board of Directors and the appropriate Local Standing Committee or Committees.
- A criterion will be added that will require the proposed project to be consistent with the Health Resource Allocation Plan.
- Posting of the COA application, DMH requests for additional information, and applicant response to request for additional information will be posted on the VDH DMH website after the application is ruled complete .
- A project-specific public comment period that will include a public hearing and an invitation of offer written comments.
- The creation of a project-specific review panel to attend the public hearing and make recommendations to the Commissioner of Health and/or the Commissioner of the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. The review panel will be appointed by one or both of the Commissioners, depending on the nature of the project.

Paul Dragon Hired to Lead COSIG Initiative

The Department of Health is pleased to announce the hiring of Paul Dragon of Underhill, Vermont, to take the position of Integrated Services Chief for the COSIG Grant. Paul currently directs the Safe Harbor Clinic for homeless adults/families in Burlington the Pearl Street Clinic for homeless youth. He was instrumental in developing the Pearl Street Clinic and has extensive experience in the interface between primary care and mental health/substance abuse. He has been the Director of Homeless Health Care at the Community Health Center of Burlington since 2000. Previously he directed Head Start programs in the Northwestern and Central Vermont counties. He has a broad background that includes four years of international development work in the Peace Corps, and teaching experience at Community Colleges of Vermont.

With the Blueprint for Health and health care reform being priorities at this time, Paul's understanding of the whole of health care is an asset not only for this project, but for VDH and the Agency as a whole. His leadership in the community in developing new projects/programs is well respected.

Behavioral Health Plays Important Role in Emergency Preparedness Drill

Behavioral Health responders were active participants in Operation Pandemic Flu, a drill conducted over the past two weeks to test the states preparedness to deal with avian and pandemic influenza. The drill involved the Department of Health, Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Southern Vermont College, University of Vermont, Emergency Management, the Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems and most of its member hospitals, as well as a number of local mental health agencies.

Trained responders from four of the 10 designated mental health agencies participated: Healthcare and Rehabilitative Services of Southeastern Vermont; The Howard Center for Human Services; Clara Martin Center; and United Counseling Services. Behavioral Health was also represented in the state Health Operations Center and deployed responders throughout the state to designated drill locations. The role of behavioral health was to provide psychological first aid and education on self-care in this simulated, potentially stressful situation. The exercise presented an excellent educational opportunity in providing psychological support to individuals and first responders in a farm setting, at a college campus with quarantine imposed, and at a vaccination clinic for first responders.

FUTURES PROJECT

VSH Employees Work Group

The work group is preparing a written report and oral presentation for the Futures Advisory Committee at their September 18th meeting. Of the many staffing options considered, the group selected the three most preferred models for a new psychiatric inpatient program. The models selected are those that are deemed most likely to preserve and transition the Vermont State Hospital workforce to the new inpatient program.

The report will provide a context for the recommendations:

- Historical changes in the size and function of the state hospital

- Futures Plan recommendation and rationale to co-locate the new inpatient program with an academic medical center
- Current state hospital operations with classified state employees and contracted Fletcher Allen specialists
- Formation of the VSH Employees Work Group

The core recommendations of the report will address the work group's operating assumptions, present the preferred staffing options, and identify the requirements for success.

One more meeting is planned, but not yet scheduled for late August to finalize the draft report.

Public Hearing Scheduled for Proposed Community Residential Recovery Project in Williamstown

The proposal to create a 14-bed community residential recovery project at the site of the former Autumn Harvest Inn on Route 64 in Williamstown, Vermont will be the subject of an upcoming public hearing and public comment period. The hearing is scheduled for Thursday, August 3, 2006 from 4-6 p.m. in the auditorium of the Pavilion Building at 109 State Street in Montpelier. The applicant, Creative Solutions Corporation, is a consortium of three Vermont Designated Agencies, and will offer a 20 minute overview of the proposed project. A small review panel has been convened to attend the hearing and make recommendations to Acting Commissioner of Health Sharon Moffatt who will decide whether or not to grant a Certificate of Approval after considering the recommendations of the review panel, Division of Mental Health staff and the general public. Individuals interested in attending the hearing are asked to enter the Pavilion building from the Governor Davis Avenue entrance.

The public is also welcome to submit comments about the proposal. Written comments should be submitted no later than August 4, 2006 and should be directed to Dawn Philibert, Mental Health Systems Development Director, Vermont Department of Health, 108 Cherry Street, Burlington, VT 05402, or electronically to dphilib@vdh.state.vt.us.

The Williamstown Certificate of Approval Application and related documents can be found by going to the Futures Home Page at <http://healthvermont.gov/mh/futures/futureshome.aspx> and scrolling to the bottom of the page to "Certificate of Approval to Develop a Community Residential Recovery Program in Williamstown, Vermont".

VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL CENSUS

The Vermont State Hospital Census was 46 as of midnight Wednesday night. The average census for the past 45 days was 49.5.